

OLD FRENCH BUILDINGS.

LA FRANCE ARTISTIQUE ET MONUMENTALE. Catalogue public sous la direction de M. Henry Havard. Tome premier. Quarto, pp. iv., 204. Paris: La Librairie Illustrée. New-York: J. W. Bouton, 1893.

The discursive character of this beautiful publication, of which the first part has recently appeared on both sides of the Atlantic, does not deprive it of unity. Carried far afield by the scope of the enterprise, the distinguished writers who have placed themselves under M. Havard's direction have, nevertheless, a tacit understanding in common, which brings into close relation with each other the monographs they have prepared on some of the great monuments of their country. It is an understanding which persists in the same force nowhere as it does in France. It is the catholic appreciation of artistic achievement, which recognizes no hard and fast line dividing the architect from the sculptor or painter, but is quick to respond to the spirit of true art wherever it may be found, and sees in a nation's buildings artless possessions as are commonly seen in her statues and pictures. France has had her vandals. No other country ever came so close to the brink of an irreparable crime against art as the French came during the Commune, when the Louvre was threatened with destruction. But in the main the historic edifices of France are jealously conserved, and, what is more, enthusiastically appreciated and celebrated. Of the extent of native enthusiasm for such cathedrals as those of Rheims and Notre-Dame de Paris, for such chateaux as those of Versailles and Pau, the "advertisement" which opens this volume gives an indication even more remarkable than the papers which follow it, for it explains how the latter came to be written. To certain Frenchmen, "hommes gens, ami des beaux livres et des beaux-arts," it has seemed as though the Parisian presses were leading it too much to those of foreign cities to print works on the artistic relics of France. Instantly it was resolved to form an association of a small number of wealthy amateurs, who would subscribe the funds necessary to bring out some worthy volumes on the fine arts, and not look primarily for any return upon their investment, but find their satisfaction in the realization that they were assisting in the maintenance of the artistic supremacy of France. The association was quickly founded, and took the title of the "Société de l'Art Français." It was then necessary to choose a subject for literary and iconographic treatment, and at this point the dilettanti began to perceive that they had an embarrassment of riches before them. M. Havard barely touches upon the array of monuments which crowd upon the memory at the first summons of the latter. And yet the few names he cites are alone of almost incalculable import.

Among the ecclesiastical structures M. Havard recalls those of Poitiers, Laon, Chartres, Paris, Soissons, Rheims, Amiens, Sens and Rouen. Turning to civil and military architecture, he names Carcassonne, Pierrefonds, Châteauneuf, Ambœuf and Aigues-Mortes. In the list of chateaux the names of Blois, Chenonceaux, Chambord and Azay-le-Rideau are followed by those of Fontainebleau and Amet, Diana's splendid place. These dazzling examples are only a small proportion of the total lying ready to be utilized by the society. To fix upon any one proviso was out of the question, and the association boldly decided to traverse the field wherever possible, regarding neither chronological nor topographical conditions. The co-operation of some of the best writers on aesthetics was secured, and to these experts has been given the task of treating in brief, but not too brief, essays such relics of art as have been alluded to; their work being strengthened by such modes of illustration as the French are accustomed to employ when they desire to make a beautiful book. No limit to the number of volumes to be issued is announced. The series may and could very agreeably go on for years. The material will never be exhausted, and surely so artistic a publication could not lack support.

It is not alone their brevity which recommends these essays to readers who wish to know something about Rheims, for example, and yet do not care to be smothered with technical information, as in the text books to which they can go if they want that sort of thing. It is their whole character of vivacity and readability. The facility of the French in the short literary production has become traditional. It is well illustrated in essays like those of which the present volume is composed. M. Gonse writes of the cathedral of Rheims, M. Guiffrey of the chateau, and M. Gillie of the gardens of Versailles. The Hotel Carnavalet is treated by M. Cousin; the extraordinarily beautiful church at Brion, the church of Arnold's poem, is described by M. Havard himself; M. de Foucauld finds his subject in the majestic chateau at Pau; M. Mintz traces the history of the grim, forbidding pile which survives as a memorial of the famous papal court held at Avignon, and, finally, M. Vriante tells in a few pages what there is to be told of that charming residence in the Bois, known as "Bazatelle," which belonged to a granddaughter of Louis XIV and Mme. de Montespan, early in the last century, and is now occupied by the widow of Sir Richard Wallace. A great deal of taste, artistic feeling and of lightly borne erudition has gone to the making of all this text.

It is a little surprising to find Versailles the best known of all the monuments discussed, submitting as well as it does to the rule of compression which prevails throughout the book. It does so for a reason which M. Guiffrey points out. Enormous as it is—one of the most colossal chateaux in Europe, in fact—it is yet stamped with the idiosyncrasies of one time and, in a certain sense, one man. It mattered very little that Mansart, the Mansart of the domes of the Invalides, may have had ideas of his own, or that Le Brun, who was the decorative genius of the building, was an individuality as Le Notre, who did so much to bring the park and gardens to perfection, was also. If they gave free play to their idea it was simply because their master happened to be in sympathy with them. It is not easy to recall a more happy combination of circumstances than that which brought these three men together under Louis XIV. The Sun-king was a veritable Bernini among monarchs, with just the sense of aristocratic restraint imposed by his position, which was necessary to keep his roccoco instincts from leading him artistically astray. It may be held that for him to have been influenced by Bernini at all was an error, but that misguided Italian was not wholly vile, as the colonade of St. Peter's is there to show, and similarly Versailles represents an impulse for which it is impossible to regard Louis XIV with gratitude. The chateau fairly groans under the domination of artificiality, but the King and his satellites worked on a grand scale, and nothing can rob them of production of the grand air. The profuse decorations of Le Brun, inside and out, and of the men who collaborated with him, are in a style that not infrequently became absurdly inflated, but in the long run it is found to be really adapted to the architecture of the time, and, moreover, it not only has, at its best, the virtues of elegance and grace, but is decorative to the very core. Likewise neither Girardon nor Coysevox touches a lofty level in plastic art, but it would be useless to deny the effectiveness of their work, and of that of their school, in the fountains with which the park is so plentifully provided. They were the ideal men to reinforce Le Notre. The observation may be hazarded that Versailles owes more to Le Notre than to any other of the men whose abilities the king absorbed. He knew Italy, the scene of the finest landscape gardening of the world, and his own bent was for a magnificent, intelligent, chaste bravura. It is doubtful if the chateau would be anything like impressive as it is without the results of his skill in the setting, or if any of the spectacular groups of the ponds and basins would be half as brilliant in effect as they are unless seen through his vision. We have said that Girardon and Coysevox reinforce Le Notre. They do so, but they draw much of their strength from him. M. Guiffrey and M. Gillie write entertainingly of the kingly

REAL ESTATE.

BUSINESS AT THE EXCHANGES.

seat at Versailles, and their essays, like all the others in the book, are illustrated so copiously and so well that they succeed in presenting the chateau exactly as it is, an architectural unit. The charm of the subjects may cause the essay on the church at Brion, that on the palace at Avignon, and the two chapters on Versailles to be associated as the most interesting in the volume, but the work is excellently done from cover to cover. The cuts in the text are good, and the full page plates are Lemercier heliogravures of the best quality.

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